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ABSTRACT

This study reports on the development of a Likert scale measuring attitudes toward Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) victims (ATAV) in five phases. Participants included a total of 215 male and 268 female undergraduates at Oregon State University. The results for phase 1 yielded a scale with high part-whole correlations, corrected split-half reliability, and alpha coefficients. The following phases yielded significant correlations between the ATAV scale and attitudes toward homosexuals, homosexual parenting, other minority groups, capital punishment, and sexually liberal attitudes. Attitude toward homosexuals comprise the central component in attitudes toward AIDS victims. A varimax rotated factor analysis of the ATAV yielded one primary factor accounting for 85.9% of the variance. It appears that sexually liberal attitudes may reflect tolerance that includes sympathy for victims of AIDS. (Author/TJH)

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# AIDS victims and heterosexual attitudes

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Abstract

This study reports on the development of a Likert scale measuring attitudes towards AIDS victims (ATAV) in five phases. The results for phase 1 yielded a scale with high part-whole correlations (.62 - .90, $p \leq .001$), corrected split-half reliability (.87, $p \leq .001$) and alpha coefficients (.91, $p \leq .001$). The following phases yielded significant correlations between the ATAV scale and attitudes toward homosexuals (.60 $p \leq .001$), homosexual parenting (.64 $p \leq .001$), other minority groups (.33, .37, $p \leq .001$), capital punishment (-.27 $p \leq .001$) and sexually liberal attitudes (.22, .37, .23, $p \leq .025$). Attitudes toward homosexuals is the central component in attitudes toward AIDS victims. A varimax rotated factor analysis of the ATAV yielded one primary factor accounting for 85.9% of the variance.

AIDS victims and heterosexual attitudes

Society as a whole is becoming better aware of the varying dimensions of the AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) tragedy. Millions are now carrying the virus and the number of carriers could increase tenfold over the next five years (Landers, 1986a). Compounding this health disaster is increasing violence against homosexuals. Since the virus first attacked the homosexual community, large segments of heterosexual society view AIDS as a gay disease. One vicious consequence is further victimization of those who suffer from the disease as violence toward homosexuals has dramatically increased (Landers, 1986b).

The AIDS syndrome evidently serves as an excuse to unleash phobia and dislike of the homosexual community. Reports show that one in five gay men and one in 10 lesbians have been physically abused, and more than 90% of the total gay community have experienced some kind of victimization. To the homophobic mind, the AIDS epidemic serves as a rationalization for increased violence and victimization.

Ignorance and fear is at the basis of heterosexual attitudes toward the AIDS victim. The more aware and familiar a person is about the disease, the more tolerant toward the victims (Levine, 1986). It takes time before information is disseminated to the public. However, a person with negative attitudes toward AIDS victims will probably display selectivity in processing information about the disease. Thus, first and

foremost, attitudes toward AIDS victims is primarily a consequence of attitudes toward homosexuals.

One aspect of heterosexual attitudes toward homosexuals is expressed in a distrust of homosexual nurturing and parenting roles. The problems of gay parents and their children have received scant attention (Cramer, 1986) although many heterosexuals are opposed to custody of children, visitation rights and permission to adopt. By inference, this aspect of heterosexual attitudes may also relate more specifically to AIDS victims' attitudes.

Attitudes are generally logically consistent and bias toward one group is often reflected in bias toward other minority groups. For example, Glassner and Owen (1976) suggest that prejudice toward homosexuals is generally similar to that of other minority categories. Other studies have demonstrated a link between authoritarianism (a character defect in which prejudice plays a part in a more general anti-democratic orientation), and negative attitudes toward homosexuals (Hayes and Oziel, 1976; Ross, 1975). In a direct test Larsen, Cate and Reed (1983) demonstrated a significant correlation between attitudes toward blacks and homosexuals. Therefore a correlation is expected between AIDS victims and attitudes toward blacks and jews.

Victimizing those that suffer from the disease reflects an insensitive mind. Of course history is replete with other witch hunts

displaying public insensitivity to those that suffer. Accepting the witch hunts of the middle ages, the victimization of McCarthyism, or discrimination of AIDS victims requires an indifference to suffering. This "toughness of mind" might also be reflected in other social attitudes. One phenomena, reflecting these political times, is the reestablishment of the death penalty. As a result, thousands of condemned men, women, and yes children, await execution in the United States. Those who favor capital punishment may therefore be negative toward those suffering from AIDS.

Tolerance toward people of different social categories may in turn be a reflection of personal security and self esteem. Rejection of out groups is a central component of the authoritarian personality. Previous work has linked low self esteem to authoritarianism (Larsen, 1969). Therefore those respondents low in self esteem need to reject people from unpopular social categories.

Socially, tolerance is also manifested in a variety of sexual attitudes best characterized as liberal. The sexually conservative would undoubtedly prefer marital fidelity or abstinence as a means of combating AIDS, whereas the sexually liberal recommends the development of safe sex practices including the use of condoms. Condom advertisement may be seen as a means of educating the public in the prevention of AIDS as well as unwanted pregnancies. Where the AIDS problem is especially severe (as

San Francisco) acceptance of condom commercials appears quite high (Toufexis, 1987). In general people who approve of condom advertisements would have a concern for the AIDS problem and it's victims.

Condom use is one approach to birth control. More broadly, birth control also reflects relatively liberal sexual attitudes. Birth control is seen both as an attempt at rational planning and spacing of children (reducing parental burdens) and a sensitivity to hunger and other problems of overpopulation. These concerns are part of a liberal sexual syndrome reflected in tolerance for the victims of AIDS.

Finally, the issue of surrogate motherhood has been in the news lately. The procedure calls for the artificial insemination of the woman and a contract for adoption after birth. The willingness to use science to help infertile couples is a liberal perspective which may likewise be manifested in concern for AIDS victims.

The theory posited here essentially views attitudes toward AIDS victims as a function of attitudes toward homosexuality and related aspects. It is primarily homophobia which leads to irrational fears and persecution of the victims. Secondary factors include rejecting or ethnocentric attitudes toward other minority groups (blacks and Jews). The essential point here is the evidence for a general theory of prejudice which effects AIDS victims and other outgroups in similar ways. Also central to negative attitudes towards AIDS victims is a general

approach of callousness and toughness exemplified in attitudes toward capital punishment. Since AIDS largely results from unconventional sexual behavior, liberal sexual attitudes were thought predictive of tolerance. A final purpose for this study is the development of a scale measuring attitudes toward AIDS victims. A search of the literature shows that such a scale has yet to be developed.

## Phase 1: Scale development

### Method

Subjects. The participants who were recruited from campus locations at Oregon State University consisted of 44 male and 46 female undergraduates. The mean age was 20.8.

Procedure. The initial pool of 20 statements was collected from a variety of media statements and interviews with students. This selection was edited according to Edwards' (1957) aprioric criteria for attitude scale statements. An equal number of positive and negative statements were included in the 90 item edited pool. An attempt was made to cover the entire range of the attitude continuum. The edited pool was administered with the usual Likert introduction and 5 point response categories ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. In all phases the surveys were administered in small groups from 3-12 students.

Results

The item analysis study yielded 20 items with part-whole correlations ranging from .62 to .90 ($p \leq .001$).

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Insert Table 1 about here

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As an estimate of internal reliability the split-half correlation coefficient was calculated at .77 ($p \leq .001$), and .87 ($p \leq .001$) when corrected by the Spearman-Brown prophesy formula.

Phase 2: Alpha coefficient and construct validity

Method

Subjects. 47 male and 51 female undergraduate students recruited from various campus locations participated in the study. The mean age was 21.4

Procedure. The 20 item ATAV scale was administered with the usual Likert introduction and response categories. The survey also included the 20 item "Heterosexual attitudes toward homosexuality" (HATH) scale (Larsen, Reed and Hoffman, 1980), and the 16 item Campbell self-assessment scale (Robinson and Shaver, 1973) measuring self esteem. The HATH scale employs Likert response categories, whereas the Campbell scale is a forced choice scale.

Results

The alpha coefficient was .91 ($p \leq .001$) thus supporting the high internal consistency of the scale found in phase 1. The correlation between the ATAV and HATH scales was .60 ($p \leq .001$) and the Campbell self esteem scale .19 ($p \leq .05$). Thus the prediction that attitudes towards AIDS victims is largely a function of attitudes towards homosexuals is verified. In another study (Larsen, 1987) employing a different form of ATAV the correlation with HATH was .83 ($p \leq .001$). Together these results lend some support to the idea that homophobia is at the core of negative attitudes toward AIDS victims. The hypothesis that insecure or low self esteem individuals have more negative attitudes is also supported by the data.

Phase 3: AIDS, and attitudes toward homosexual parenting

Method

Subjects. 43 male and 40 female undergraduate students recruited from various campus locations at Oregon State University participated in the survey. The mean age was 21.5.

Procedure. The 20 item ATAV scale was administered along with the 20 item attitudes toward homosexual parental scale (Larsen, 1987). The homosexual parenting scale is a Likert type scale with part-whole

correlations ranging from .58 to .72 ($p \leq .001$), good internal reliability (.98) and known group validity ($t = 13.05$, $df = 29$, $p \leq .001$).

Results

The Pearson product moment correlation between the ATAV scale and homosexual parenting was .64 ($p \leq .001$). This moderately strong correlation adds further support to the importance of heterosexual attitudes toward homosexuals in attitudes towards the AIDS problem. Homophobia continues as a major factor in negative attitudes toward the victims of this disease.

Phase 4: AIDS, minority groups, and capital punishment

Method

Subjects. 53 male and 73 female introductory psychology students participated. The students were promised points toward their grades in exchange for their participation. The mean age was 20.3.

Procedure. The 20 item ATAV scale was administered with the 24 item anti-semitism scale (Eysenck and Crown, 1948); the 16 item anti-black scale (Steckler, 1957); and the 15 item attitudes toward capital punishment (Balogh and Mueller, 1960). All scales employed the usual Likert instructions and response categories.

## Results

Survey. The alpha coefficient was calculated yielding again .91 ($p \leq .001$). For the survey variables the ATAV scale correlated .33 ($p \leq .001$) with the anti-semitism scale, .37 ($p \leq .001$) with the anti-black scale, and -.27 ($p \leq .001$) with the capital punishment scale. Thus negative attitudes toward AIDS victims is part of a general prejudice syndrome which includes other victims of discrimination such as jews and blacks. Further, the results lend support to a toughness or callousness factor in that negative attitudes to AIDS is also related to the favoring of capital punishment.

Scale structure. A varimax rotated factor analysis with Kaiser normalization was performed on the ATAV scale to ascertain it's underlying structure. Results yielded two interpretable factors accounting for 85.9% and 14.1% of the variance respectively. Table 2 shows the factor loadings and eigenvalues for the two factors.

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Insert Table 2 about here

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The first factor loaded on items reflecting a desire for integration-segregation such as classmate with AIDS is OK (#7); willing to work alongside AIDS suffering (#9); should be permitted to attend public schools (#10); open house to anyone with AIDS (#13); live normally

as possible (#14); and willingness to frequent business which employs AIDS victims (#15). The negative items also reflect this integration-segregation theme; worried about health if co-worker has AIDS (#11); and avoiding someone with AIDS (#12).

Factor 2 seems to express an isolation theme. People with AIDS should be isolated (#1); no sympathy for victim (#2); would not embrace someone (#4); AIDS victims are a menace (#6); live promiscuous lives (#8); would not want to touch (#16); are dangerous in public (#18); and would not want to associate with (#19). The positive item would offer support to a friend with AIDS (#5).

Although the factor analysis yielded two independent factors some items cross-load. Further, the second factor accounts for relatively small amounts of the variance. The scale is therefore best used as a unitary instrument as reflected by the Spearman-Brown and Alpha coefficients reported.

Phase 5: AIDS and sexually liberal attitudes

This phase reports the results for separate studies on the relationship of attitudes towards AIDS victims and factors which reflect sexually liberal attitudes (condom advertisement, birth control, and surrogate parenting).

AIDS, condom advertisement and surrogate parenting

Method

Subjects. The participants were 28 male and 58 female undergraduate students at Oregon State University sampled from campus locations. The mean age was 27.0.

Procedure. A survey consisting of the ATAV scale, a 21 item attitude toward condom advertisement (Spearman-Brown .94, $p \leq .001$, part-whole correlations ranging from .40 to .60; Larsen, 1987c); and the 20 item Wang and Thurstone attitude toward birth control scale (Shaw and Wright, 1967) was administered to the participants.

Results. The Pearson-product moment correlation between ATAV and attitudes toward condom advertisement was .22 (.025) and birth control .34 ($p \leq .001$). These results support the idea that attitudes toward AIDS are related to sexually liberal attitudes. One interpretation would suggest that sexually liberal attitudes reflect a tolerance syndrome manifested in sympathy toward a variety of victims of discrimination.

AIDS and surrogate parenting

Method

Subjects. Participants were selected from introductory psychology and sociology courses at Oregon State University. The participants received points toward their grades for answering the survey. 34 of the respondents were female and 65 were male, with a mean age of 24.7.

Procedure. The ATAV scale was administered along with the attitude toward surrogate motherhood scale (Spearman-Brown = .73, $p \leq .001$; part-whole correlations = .48 - .75, $p \leq .001$; Larsen, 1987d).

Results. The Pearson product moment correlation between the ATAV and surrogate motherhood was .23 ($p \leq .025$). Attitudes toward surrogate motherhood reflect relatively recent use of science and technology to help infertile couples. The sexually conservative may view this procedure as intervention in the natural or ordained order of things, whereas the liberal person might be moved by the plight of the victim of infertility and therefore also other victims.

## Summary

This program of studies sought to: (a) develop a reliable and valid scale of attitudes towards the victims of AIDS (ATAV) and (b) develop a theoretical statement on the relationship of ATAV attitudes to other social attitudes. The five phases of research yielded a scale with high part-whole correlations and internal consistency as measured by both the Spearman-Brown, and Alpha coefficients.

The theory which guided the construct validating studies defines attitudes toward AIDS victims as primarily a function of attitudes toward homosexuals and the related concept of homosexual parenting. Irrational homophobia leads to further victimization of those who suffer from the disease. Attitudes toward AIDS victims can be seen as part of a broader

ethnocentric syndrome which includes representatives of other minority groups. Callousness and intolerance may also be reflected in the current political climate by attitudes toward capital punishment. Finally, since AIDS is perceived as a consequence of unconventional behavior, sexually liberal attitudes are seen as predictive of attitudes toward victims of AIDS.

Phase 1 yielded a 20 item Likert type scale with high corrected split-half correlation. Results from two other phases yielded high alpha coefficients. Phase 2 (and another study) show moderately high correlations between ATAV and heterosexual attitudes toward homosexuals. To a small extent AIDS attitudes correlate also with self esteem. Phase 3 lends further support to the centrality of homosexual attitudes, yielding a moderate correlation between AIDS victims and homosexual parenting attitudes. In Phase 4 the results yielded significant correlations with attitudes toward jews and blacks suggesting the AIDS attitudes are part of a broader ethnocentric syndrome. A relationship was also found to mental "toughness" as exemplified in attitudes toward capital punishment. Finally, in Phase 5 two separate studies demonstrated a relationship between attitudes towards AIDS and sexually liberal attitudes. This suggests that sexually liberal attitudes may reflect tolerance which includes sympathy for victims of the disease.

Table 1

Attitudes Toward AIDS Victims Scale (ATAV)

| Item | Part-whole Correlations |
|---|---|
| 1. Victims of AIDS represent a forgotten part of our society. | .90 |
| 2. More media coverage should be given to the plight of AIDS patients. | .79 |
| *3. I would avoid someone if I knew they had AIDS. | .75 |
| *4. People with AIDS should be grouped together and isolated. | .75 |
| *5. Persons with AIDS are dangerous to allow in public. | .73 |
| *6. People with AIDS are a menace to society. | .72 |
| 7. I would work alongside someone I knew had AIDS. | .71 |
| 8. People with AIDS should be allowed to attend public school. | .71 |
| 9. I would offer whatever support necessary if a friend had AIDS. | .71 |
| *10. I would be worried for my health if a coworker had AIDS. | .70 |
| 11. I would open up my house to anyone with AIDS. | .67 |

Table 1 (cont'd)

Attitudes Toward AIDS Victims Scale (ATAV)

| | Item | Part-whole Correlations |
|---|---|---|
| *12. | I would not want a person with AIDS to touch me. | .67 |
| *13. | I avoid people with AIDS. | .67 |
| *14. | Persons with AIDS are probably living promiscuous lives. | .66 |
| *15. | I feel no sympathy for someone with AIDS. | .65 |
| 16. | I wouldn't mind if one of my child's classmates had AIDS. | .64 |
| 17. | I would frequent a business which employed AIDS victims. | .64 |
| 18. | If someone gets AIDS, they should be allowed to continue living as normally as possible. | .63 |
| *19. | I would not associate with a person who had AIDS, even if they were a close friend. | .63 |
| *20. | I would probably not embrace someone with AIDS. | .62 |

*Reverse weights for negative (*) items.

Table 2

Varimax rotated factor analysis* with Kaiser normalization on the ATAV scale.

| Items | Factor 1 | Factor 2 |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | | .56 |
| 2 | | .62 |
| 4 | | .49 |
| 5 | | .51 |
| 6 | | .60 |
| 7 | .76 | |
| 8 | | .46 |
| 9 | .79 | |
| 10 | .66 | |
| 11 | .68 | |
| 12 | .59 | |
| 13 | .64 | |
| 14 | .39 | |
| 15 | .55 | |
| 16 | | .62 |
| 18 | | .55 |

Table 2 (cont'd)

Varimax rotated factor analysis* with Kaiser normalization on the ATAV scale.

| Items | Factor 1 | Factor 2 |
|---|---|---|
| 19 | | .52 |
| Eigenvalues | 6.67 | 1.09 |

*Items 3, 17 yielded relatively low part-whole correlations in reanalysis and were eliminated.

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